

# **PRISON CONDITIONS IN POLAND**

**JUNE 1988**

## **A HELSINKI WATCH REPORT**

**36 West 44th Street  
New York, NY 10036**

**739 Eighth Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003**

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by HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH  
(Helsinki Watch, Asia Watch, Americas Watch)**

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This report was prepared by Herman Schwartz, Professor of Law at The American University, with the assistance of Mary C. Schwartz. It is based on a fact-finding mission to Poland conducted by Professor Schwartz in June of 1987.

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## Introduction

The concern for human rights violations stemming from political controversies can blind us to the more commonplace brutalities that so many nations routinely perpetrate in their prison systems.

Poland is a notable example. Among the repressive regimes of Eastern Europe, Poland has usually been considered one of the more tolerant. Although the government no longer recognizes a formal opposition, as it once did with Solidarity, an underground culture pervades Polish life, with some 300 unofficial newspapers and magazines, "second society" publishing houses that publish hundreds of books annually, and the release of formerly banned Polish films. Since a 1986 amnesty, Poland has had relatively few political prisoners.

Prison conditions, however, remain dreadful, as a visit to Poland in June 1987 revealed. Many prisons date from the 19th century. A 1985 report by the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Communist Party found that at fifteen institutions, "there is not satisfactory plumbing; ... at thirteen, sanitary facilities do not function." The paper urged that seven pre-trial detention centers be closed immediately.

Solidarity members who were in prison report that many of the cells are terribly cold in winter, when the temperature outside goes as low as -17 degrees Fahrenheit, and stifling hot in the summer. Clothing is scanty and rarely changed. Windows are often kept shut or opened just a few inches, and ventilation is bad. Some of the cells are directly on wet ground and always damp. Many are badly lit.

The worst places are police lock-ups. Because these are supposed to be for brief stays of no more than 48 hours, there are virtually no facilities there. But one woman reported she was kept there a week and others, particularly political prisoners, as much as three months. The cells in the lock-up, the woman reported, were filthy and overcrowded--up to 14 women in a cell about 13' x 16'.

There was no toilet, only a bucket, and no toilet paper. There were no sanitary napkins and menstruating women had to use their own clothing. The food was dreadful and the cells were infested with insects. No exercise was permitted. For weeks after she left the place, our informant told us, she still felt as if she smelled.

Overcrowding is a severe problem throughout the Polish prison system. Poland's penal code imposes very long prison sentences\* and its prisoner to population ratio, between 280 and 320 per 100,000, is one of the highest in Europe and North America. Its ancient system, with a capacity of 90,000 -- which, realistically means about 70-75,000 -- must thus accommodate from 100-120,000, and it obviously cannot do it humanely. Many Polish prisons provide only 2 or 3 square meters per person.

Serious health problems are inevitable. Tuberculosis is common, as are herpes and other skin diseases, and degenerative bone diseases of the back and spine are common because of the lack of exercise, which for most prisoners, consists of only a daily half-hour walk, often cut by the guards to 15 minutes. Prison rules forbid lying down during the day.

Women suffer particularly from gynecological ailments and kidney inflammations. Sanitary napkins are scarce everywhere, so women tear out and use the matting from mattresses. Pregnant women have it particularly hard, since there is no running water or toilets in some cells. In one prison, there is no running water in the delivery ward of the prison hospital and women in the last weeks of pregnancy have to carry and empty buckets of filthy water containing human waste.

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\* According to a January 12, 1988 broadcast on the Polish radio, an official commission that has been discussing guidelines for changes in the Polish penal law found that during the last 15 years penal policy in Poland has become more stringent. The average penalty is two years and three months, whereas a dozen or so years ago it was just over one year. (Reported by Uncensored Poland, No. 2/88)

The medical staff, which is part of and under the prison administration, is rarely inclined to exercise independent judgment. It was described by one distinguished doctor as indifferent, inadequate in number, and poorly trained.

The health problems are compounded by inadequate nutrition. The food lacks vitamins, and efforts to send some in are blocked by officials. There is little meat, and fresh vegetables are almost never seen. There was one exception: after the Chernobyl nuclear accident, when the Polish population was fearful of eating radioactively contaminated food, "fresh vegetables" suddenly became plentiful in the prisons.

Among the most troublesome features of the Polish prison system is the enormous amount of brutality and other physical abuse. Beating of prisoners appears to be commonplace, particularly during interrogations, and when the guards get drunk, a frequent occurrence on holidays. Clubs, fists, and very large heavy keys are used. Non-political prisoners appear to be subject to such beatings more than the politicals are, but some members of Solidarity received such abuse -- one Solidarity leader, Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, had his genitals twisted, and hunger strikers were force fed in a particularly brutal way. The forcible feeding is done by a tube through the nose; Czeslaw Bielecki, an architect and activist who holds the record for the longest hunger strike (11 months), described it as "equivalent to a rape." He suffered severe injuries to his jaw from the force used to restrain him during such feedings.

Punishment cells are particularly severe. The "thermos box" is a very small, hot, badly ventilated, stifling isolation cell in which a prisoner is confined naked. "Hard beds" are another punishment in which prisoners are forced to sleep on wooden slats. Up to a few years ago, prisoners were tightly strapped into beds, and rendered almost incapable of breathing. Severe injuries like broken ribs sometimes resulted from this "belts" form of punishment which is supposed to have been stopped, though there are reports that it is still being used.

Prisoners have almost no recourse for relief. Unlike the United States, where judges have been trying to ameliorate unconstitutional prison conditions since the late 1960's, the courts are not available. Prison rules setting out the

rights and duties of prisoners are kept secret, although the clandestine Polish Helsinki Committee has recently obtained and published some of them. Prison guards conceal their identities and are known only by nicknames. So-called "penitentiary judges" are supposed to monitor the prisons, but their authority was reduced in 1971, after they tried to respond to prisoner complaints in the 1960's, and they are now largely ineffectual. Outside pressures from the West during the 1980's have done some good, but these stopped when most of the political prisoners were released.

As a result there was a massive wave of prison uprisings in 1980-81, which then subsided, only to erupt again in May 1987 at a large prison 150 miles northwest of Warsaw. Some 1,700 prisoners went on a rampage smashing windows and furniture and burning bedding. After the uprising was quelled, they went on a hunger strike. The specific causes are not clear. One source attributed it to abuse of a prisoner for complaining about a theft, as well as a rise in food prices. The food price increase is a serious hardship, for prisoners are given little to eat, and must buy extra food, but earn very little or nothing at all.

The lack of a meaningful remedy has produced a particularly bizarre form of protest, especially among younger and emotionally disturbed criminal prisoners -- self-mutilation. Many observers confirmed that prisoners slash themselves with razors and engage in horrifyingly bizarre forms of self-injury as a protest, or to be transferred out of a particularly brutal place.

There are a few indications of official concern about the Polish prison situation, and in 1981, Solidarity apparently did succeed in making some reforms. But with martial law and the release of almost all the political prisoners, these reforms were soon reversed.

The Polish prison situation, bad as it is, is probably not unique. World Health Organization minimum standards are routinely ignored throughout the world. Unfortunately, the very pervasiveness of the problem has produced a virtual indifference to it; the frustration in trying to improve things is also dispiriting. Yet the number of people victimized by inhumane prison conditions is so huge, the conditions often so barbarous, and the situation so widespread that the problem should rank high on human rights agendas. As Jerzy Kropiwnicki, a Solidarity activist from Lodz, urged us in parting, "Speak out!"



\* \* \*

This report is based on interviews during a visit to Poland in June 1987 with former prisoners and Polish penal experts, as well as on Solidarity press and other written materials. A request to visit Polish penal institutions was made several months in advance of the visit, but the Polish Government did not reply.

By letter dated March 10, 1988, after this report was written, The Research Institute on Judicial Law of the Polish Ministry of Justice responded to a request dated December 22, 1987 from the author of this report with the information that "on December 31, 1987 there was [sic] in Poland 81 prisons and 70,801 inmates serving the prison sentences imposed by the courts." This figure does "not include the pretrial detention centers and pretrial detainees." The figure of 70,800 is much lower than other estimates, including that of Stanislaus Wrona, Deputy Director of the General Headquarters of the Penitentiaries, that in May 1987, there were 97,000 inmates in the system, though he may have been including pretrial detainees. The number of prisons for sentenced prisoners -- 81 -- is of course, far fewer than the 200-220 estimate in the report, which includes the pretrial detention and police lock-up facilities.

This report focuses on the 1980's and deals with six areas of concern: physical conditions, including population data and the physical environment; health, including the special problems facing women prisoners; physical and similar abuses; work and other prison activities; contacts with the outside world; and remedies for human rights violations.

In every one of these respects, the Polish prison system falls far short of the most minimal standards.

## **The Physical Environment of Polish Prisons\***

It is estimated that the Polish prison system contains between 200 and 220 penal institutions; because of the absence of official data, no more precise figure is available.

The physical environment of many and perhaps most of these institutions is intolerable. They are ancient, overcrowded, damp, stuffy, cold in winter and hot in summer. Sanitary conditions often verge on the indecent.

There are supposed to be three levels of hardship in the Polish prison system, under Article 40 of the Polish Penal Code -- regular, alleviated, and increased rigor -- but the authorities have created a severe-rigor level that some experts consider unauthorized by the law.\*\* The capacity of the system is approximately 100,000, which means in practice, about 75,000-80,000, since there are always some cells in need of repair and a substantial number are used for special purposes like punishment. Stanislaw Wrona, Deputy Director of the General Headquarters of the Penitentiaries Facilities has conceded that anything over 70,000-80,000 produces overcrowding. According to one expert, the

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\* Unless otherwise indicated, "prisons" refers to facilities that house either sentenced prisoners or pretrial detainees. The special problems of police station facilities will be discussed separately in the report.

\*\* T. Szymanowski, "Basic Trends of Development in the Polish Penitentiary System," XIII *Archiwum Kryminologii* (1986).

legally minimum space of 10 cubic meters per prisoner cannot be met with a population of more than 75,000.\*

In this system are packed some 100,000-120,000 inmates. No reliable population figures are available, though in May 1987, Deputy Director Wrona said there were 97,000 inmates, which most experts consider much too low an estimate. One Polish political scientist informed us that a German journal, *Monatschrifts for Kriminologie und Shafrechts Reform*, reported that in March 1986, there were 28,537 pretrial detainees, and 86,554 sentenced prisoners in the Polish system, making a total of 115,095.\*\* This results in a prisoner-to-population ratio of about 310 prisoners for every 100,000 Poles.

Some earlier estimates are even higher. In 1981, the Polish Helsinki Committee estimated that there were 200,000 prisoners in the system and Deputy Director Wrona conceded that in 1974 the population was as high as 126,000 inmates. Some prisons are said to be more than 50 per cent overcrowded, and in 1980 some were said to be at 200 per cent of capacity.\*\*\*

The overcrowding results largely from the Polish legal system's use of lengthy prison terms as its primary sanction. As a result, the official weekly *Polityka* has estimated that one Pole out of every four will be incarcerated at some time in his life.\*\*\*\*

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\* Interview published in the official weekly *Polityka*, June 20, 1986.

\*\* Issue No. 70, 1987.

\*\*\* T. Szymanowski, *op. cit.*

\*\*\*\* This is from the underground journal *Praworządność* which published in issues 8 through 14 a series of articles entitled "Prisons of the Polish People's Republic," copies of which are in the files of Helsinki Watch.

Overcrowding creates terrible problems for prison systems, particularly those that are already in distress for lack of staff and resources. In Poland, inmates are crowded into small cells, sometimes as many as 8-12 people in a cell designed for one. According to one academic estimate, almost half the prisoners are in cells with between 6 and 15 inmates, and most of the rest are in even larger groups.\* Prisoners sleep in double and triple decker bunks - if they are lucky. Many are forced to sleep on the floor. Wladyslaw Frasnyniuk, a Solidarity leader who was in many prisons between October 1982 and September 1986, reported that in Barczewo prison in 1983-85, small two-man cells were used for four people; in Wroclaw in 1982, 6-8 people were confined in an 8 sq. meter cell. In 1985, Anna Pracka was sentenced to three years in Olszynka Grochowska, a woman's prison in Warsaw for relatively short-term offenders, where cells designed for 14 often held 30, 22 and 18, and where inmates had to sleep on the floor.\*\* A 1985 report by the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party found that "the incarcerated are forced to sleep on floor mattresses. In these cells . . . there was about 3-4 square meters per prisoner. The norm established by the World Health Organization as the minimum space necessary to allow psychological and physical health is ten square meters."\*\*\*

Other facilities and staff are equally inadequate. The educational level of the guards, for example, is relatively low, for only a secondary education is required, and the guards' special training is only with respect to the rules and keeping order, not how to deal with people under stress.

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\* T. Szymanowski, op. cit.

\*\* Uncensored Poland, No. 20/85.

\*\*\* Committee in Support of Solidarity Reports, "In Dirty, Crowded Cells-Prison Conditions in The Polish People's Republic," Feb. 16, 1986.

These prisons are not only overcrowded, but many are ancient and dilapidated. Few prisons have been built or even renovated since World War II and many date to the nineteenth century and even earlier.\* Even officially sanctioned expert groups have condemned many Polish prisons as unfit for human beings. The 1985 report by the Academy of Social Sciences Committee recommended that "seven houses of detention should be immediately closed down due to the unsatisfactory state of prison conditions. At fifteen penitential institutions there is no satisfactory plumbing; at thirteen, sanitary facilities do not function."

## Police Station Lockups

The worst conditions are probably the temporary detention centers in the police stations, known in the United States as "lockups." A 1985 report by the Social Health Council in Poland, an underground group, described the sanitary conditions in such places as "disastrous," singling out an investigative jail in Warsaw on Wilcza St., and a provincial police station in Radom as the worst.\*\* In such places -- and the report considers them not atypical -- the cells are terribly stuffy because the only source of ventilation is a small window or two, covered with glass. The cells are usually very cold, especially at night, and dark, even during the day, though a light bulb is kept on 24 hours a day. There is no running water or toilet in the cells; inmates are often given just buckets, which are kept in the cells. Blankets and mattresses are filthy, smelly and stained with blood or excrement, as are the walls. Insects, rats and mice are common. Breakfast and supper are a pint of artificial black coffee and bread with lard; lunch consists of soup and bread.

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\* Polish Helsinki Committee, "Problems of the Polish Penitentiary System in the Light of the Political and Civil Rights Pacts," June 1987.

\*\* Zeszyty Niezależnej Myśli Lekarskiej, No. 6, December 1985.

A report from Lower Silesia and from a former inmate confirms and amplifies the Social Health Council report. In August 1986, a Solidarity newsletter reported:

Prison conditions in lower Silesia are worsening in comparison with 1982-1984, according to reports from political prisoners being held in that region. Conditions are particularly bad in cells at police headquarters. In most cases, prisoners are not permitted to contact their lawyers and are usually strip-searched before meeting with them. The prison cells are invariably overcrowded; in the Walbrzych prison, for example, there is only 1.7 square yards per person. Windows are often sealed shut and most prisoners suffer a loss of vision from poor lighting. The cells are poorly heated in winter. Prisoners are rarely permitted packages with health care products from the outside, resulting in the rampant spread of skin diseases. Prison food lacks nutrition and is prepared from stale ingredients, which contributes to alimentary canal disorders among the prisoners. It is now more difficult to supply food packages from the outside than it was in 1982-1984. Medicines are prescribed according to the whims of prison officials, who tend to disregard doctors' orders. Prisoners who take ill must wait at least a week before seeing a doctor. Prison guards frequently beat their charges. Political prisoners subjected to beatings during investigations often suffer permanent skull and spinal injuries. Prisoners of conscience are placed in cells together with common criminals, who terrorize them. Prison guards as a rule do not intervene.\*

Prisoners are supposed to remain in these police lockups no more than 48 hours, but one prisoner, Joanna Szczesna, was held there for a week in July 1982, and others have been kept there for as long as three months, especially in

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\* News/Solidarity, Brussels, Aug. 31, 1986.

rural areas. Ms. Szczesna informed us that she was kept in a 16' by 13' cell in the Mokotow lockup in Warsaw\* with as many as 13 other women.

Ms. Szczesna's experience confirmed the report of the Social Health Council. In her cell, there was no toilet, but only a bucket, and no toilet paper; menstruating women had to use their own clothing for sanitary napkins. Windows were generally closed, or open just a few inches, making the cells stuffy and hot. There were no beds so she had to sleep on a 2" plastic slab under filthy blankets. Everything smelled dreadfully.

Ms. Szczesna found the medical and health conditions in the lockup particularly bad. Pregnant women and those with health problems were given virtually no medical assistance, and Ms. Szozena herself was not allowed to have even her own medicines. There were no facilities for exercise or even walks.

Prisoners were also often subjected to humiliating strip searches and body cavity searches.

Police station lockups in countries outside Poland are frequently unfit for human habitation, but in most places, they are only for overnight stays, not for days, weeks or even months, as in Poland. And even by the debased standards of the typical lockup, the Polish variety seems particularly egregious.

## **Pretrial Detention Centers**

Prisoners awaiting trial are usually confined in separate detention centers during the pretrial period. In Poland, these periods can last a long time. Nevertheless, conditions in the centers are often almost as bad as those in the lockups.

In 1982-83, Zofia Romaszewska was kept awaiting trial at Mokotow Detention Center in Warsaw. She reported on her experience in an open letter to the Polish Parliament in May 1983 and in an interview in June 1987.

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\* Mokotow is also a detention center and prison, and this description of lockup conditions applies only to that part of the facility.

At Mokotow, Ms. Romaszewska was mixed in with murderers and prostitutes in a very stuffy cell. "Hot summer days, when the cells are heated by the sun, and the windows are closed, are unbearable," she wrote. The cells were also very dark. Medical problems were ignored, particularly at night, when staff members were often drunk. Guards frequently searched the cells, and threw together all the belongings of the different prisoners, often tearing the items. If the guards did not like the occupants of the cell, they spilled sugar, salt and other things on the floor, and cut up the mattresses. Naked strip searches were common, often humiliating the prisoners. The food was "disgusting."\*

The prison administration tried to isolate political prisoners in particular, and so those prisoners saw almost nobody other than their cell-mates. "Any access to priests is impossible," reported Ms. Romaszewska in her 1983 letter. "Listening to Holy Mass, broadcast officially on the radio, is not allowed. It is often impossible to obtain a prayer book or the Bible once one is detained."

Joanna Szczesna was in the Mokotow Detention Center and her description of conditions there generally matched Ms. Romaszewska's. Ms. Szczesna confirmed also that the guards often destroyed letters, notes, and other items, especially when the prisoners were out of the cells, and often took things belonging to the prisoners. She was intensively interrogated for three weeks, and though she was not herself physically abused, she was threatened with a beating and a long prison term. She knew of other women who had been beaten, and one woman was told she would have her children taken away from her and put into a home, if she did not cooperate.

Jozef Sreniowski was in the Lodz Detention Center in 1984-85. He was put in a cell with young offenders; he and many other political prisoners believe that this practice is designed to subject them to physical abuse by their young

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\* Uncensored Poland, No. 18/83, "Letter to Parliament on Situation in Warsaw Mokotow Prison, May 1983."



cellmates. This did not happen to Sreniowski. While in that cell, he saw a great deal of torture and beating of the young prisoners to make them confess.\*

Medical care was virtually non-existent. An asthmatic young prisoner died on December 17, 1984, probably from lack of care; another died of heart disease at about the same time. After Sreniowski reported these, a court ordered improvements in the hygienic conditions, but nothing was done. Diabetics, epileptics, and those with eye diseases obtained virtually no medical treatment or medicines. The food was poor, inadequate and unsanitary and many prisoners fell ill with food poisoning.

Sreniowski also spent time at a Lodz detention center in 1984-85. The cells there were very dirty, and though there was a toilet in the cell, there was no toilet paper. The cells were also very cold, and when a window was broken, it was not repaired for two weeks, even though the temperature outside fell to -27 degrees centigrade. Many prisoners developed pneumonia, a very common illness in Polish prisons, and some developed tuberculosis. These were transferred out of Lodz.

Other detention centers were just as bad. In Zamosc jail, inmates have to sleep on a cement floor, with no sheets. When an inmate is interrogated, he misses all his meals.\*\*

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\* See Appendix I, p. 50.

\*\* Praworzadnosć [an underground journal], "Testimonies: Situation of Political Prisoners in the Zamosc Jail, December 1985."

## Prisons for Sentenced Prisoners

The physical conditions for sentenced prisoners are usually not much better than those in the pre-trial detention facilities. Leczyca, built in the 19th century, seems particularly grim, according to several accounts. The cells in that prison are reported to be very badly ventilated, with windows that cannot be opened; in September 1985, the windows were covered with plexiglass which resulted in hunger strikes by the political prisoners who were beaten in response. In summer, the heat and lack of ventilation cause some inmates to faint. The prison is damp and on wet ground so that even in summer, the cells on the first floor are always cold. The cells also have inadequate light, though according to Wladyslaw Frasyuniuk, "the dampness and lack of air were the worst aspects." Reports indicate that cells in Leczyca usually have 20 occupants, but sometimes 40-50.

Barczewo, which was built by the Germans for particularly difficult prisoners, had no running water in the section where the political prisoners were housed, when Frasyuniuk was there in 1983-1984. As at Leczyca, the ground floor cells were directly on the earth and therefore very cold in winter. Two-man cells were used for four. Wroclaw Prison is reported to have cells for political prisoners that were specially barred and blocked off from any air. Six to eight people were put in an 8-square meter cell. Lubsko Prison, west of Wroclaw, is an especially cold prison.

Reports about Sluzewiec Prison, in Warsaw, where short-term offenders are confined, indicate that many inmates slept on the floor, with as many as 18 inmates in a cell with only 11 beds. There were no sewage facilities but only buckets that are emptied twice a day, when inmates are permitted to go to the bathroom. There was no toilet paper, and not even enough newsprint.

Despite the cold, inmates are given inadequate clothing, which is often dirty and ill-fitting, and rarely changed or cleaned. In Sluzewiec Prison, inmates sometimes have to wear the same underwear for two weeks. Blankets are often filthy and threadbare. According to one penologist, women are given one skirt every three years, and one blouse every two years; men are allowed one pair of

trousers, one set of pajamas, and one shirt every two years. In some cases, prisoners are given special permission to wear their own clothes.

The Academy of Social Sciences of the Communist Party Central Committee report summed up the physical conditions of Polish prisons as follows:

Many institutions were infested with rats and insects; cells were dirty, since there are no sanitary provisions; and prisoners lived in dark cell, since during the day the "window blinds" do not let light through while at night only one bulb of low intensity (not even bright enough to read) is allowed to burn. In the wintertime, the majority of cells were severely cold. Prisoners lived in filth: their right to receive one bath a week was not observed.

## Health Conditions in Polish Prisons

As one would expect, health conditions are very poor among prisoners, and medical care is grossly inadequate, sometimes verging on the criminally negligent. According to Dr. Zofia Kuratowska, an internationally known hematologist who examined approximately 1,000 released political prisoners, the health of prisoners deteriorates very seriously and rapidly in Polish prisons. The most common illnesses are tuberculosis, mycosis, and degenerative bone diseases from the lack of exercise; for most prisoners, exercise usually consists of nothing more than a daily half-hour or hour walk in a small space, which is often cut to 15 minutes or less, and to only a few times per week.\* About 80 per cent of 348 prisoners examined in a 1984 study also had advanced periodontic disease, and a majority had suffered at least once from food poisoning. Skin diseases were common and coronary diseases either developed or were aggravated in prison. Eyesight was frequently affected because of the inadequate lighting in the cells.\*\*

Because the food is so poor and lacking in vitamins, peptic ulcers are especially common among political prisoners. Prison officials have refused to allow families to send in vitamins, which are sometimes smuggled in anyway. In her letter to Parliament, Zofia Romaszewska described the food in Mokotow Prison in 1983 as follows:

Food is disgusting, completely without any taste. Rotten sauerkraut and beetroots are served without any seasoning,

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\* Zeszyty Niezależnej Myśli Lekarskiej, op. cit.

\*\* Committee in Support of Solidarity Reports, Krakow Committee of Health Workers of KOS, "The State of Health of Political Prisoners," Nov. 28, 1984.

actually beaten, the interrogators tried to hang her by the shoulders of her blouse, but she is a large woman and the blouse could not hold her. The interrogation continued for two months.

Physical force was often used on political prisoners who protested prison conditions. In Leczyca, in September 1985, Jozef Sreniowski was beaten when he and some other political prisoners, including Solidarity leader Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, protested the installation of plexiglass in the windows which would make the cells even stuffier than before. Three to six guards systematically beat each of the prisoners with folded towels, shoes, and hands, and the prisoners' ankles and genitals were twisted. In other protests, Sreniowski was kicked in the spine, leaving him with a chronic back problem; his head was also banged against a table.

The Polish Helsinki Committee, quoting a statement by a prisoner sentenced for a common crime who participated in the events, reported another such response to a protest in Bialystok Prison in 1983:

The protest action was planned by prisoners to begin on October 10. We planned to undertake a hunger strike, to protest against prison conditions, repeated cases of beatings and strict disciplinary measures introduced by the prison warden. On the morning of October 10, the entire prison guard staff was put on alert. They attempted to crush the prisoners' protests through "milder forms of beating and kicking and beatings using only fists." Guards, prison officers, doctors and even the cooks participated. Three cellblocks, housing about 220 prisoners, were involved in the protest, including several of political prisoners.

At first, only some prisoners were taken from the three cellblocks, including six from my own section housing 60 prisoners. They were lined up with their faces to the wall and their hands spread out. There were more than ten guards in riot gear (helmets and shields); they also held unmuzzled dogs with them. The prisoners selected were then taken to a part of the prison where the punishment cells are located. All were ordered to strip naked and, after a thorough search of their clothing, they were taken to cells with "hard beds." Shortly thereafter the prisoners were called by name to pass through

what is called "the health path," two parallel rows of guards armed with truncheons who beat those passing through the path. They were then escorted back to their cells.

Around 9:20 a.m., the prisoners were again dragged out and forced to traverse another "health path," this time leading to the punishment cells. They were beaten with truncheons 80 cm. in length as well as with other objects. Most of the prison guards were intoxicated. The prisoners were then taken back to their cells and beaten until noon, at which time they broke down and the hunger strike was effectively ended. After the failure of the protest at Bialystok prison, all hell broke loose. Prisoners were beaten indiscriminately with wooden hammers used for testing iron, metal bars, truncheons, and spiked boots. Some prisoners were beaten unconscious at the slightest pretext.\*

Solidarity leader Wladyslaw Frasyniuk was a particular target of abuse. Frasyniuk spent almost four years in the Polish prison system, from 1982 to 1986, during which he was in five different institutions. He was labeled a "dangerous" prisoner and was continually subjected to special treatment, including solitary confinement. He saw and personally experienced a great many beatings. In July 1983, he and other political prisoners in Leczyca prison protested mistreatment of the non-politicals. When he offered passive resistance to being transferred to a punishment cell, a group of guards carried him to the cell. While he was being carried, one guard twisted his genitals so severely that pains continued for two years afterward. The prison doctor refused even to examine him.

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\* Polish Helsinki Committee Report to the U.N. Human Rights Commission, March 1984, published in English by Helsinki Watch and the New York Committee in Support of Solidarity in September 1984.

A few months later, he was transferred to Barczewo prison, which he considers the worst he experienced. He was frequently hit.\* In late October or November 1985, in Lodz prison, he tried to see a doctor and some drunken guards beat and kicked him. Transferred to Lubsko prison in November 1985, which he described as the coldest prison in which he had been because it had no coal supplies, he was beaten again, once very severely. In January and February 1986, he was put into a punishment cell where the temperature was very cold. After 14 days, he was taken for a warm bath. The warm water was suddenly turned off and cold water run. The day was very cold, and when Frasyniuk complained, his stay in the punishment cell was extended. His joints became badly inflamed. Ultimately he served 44 days in this cell.

Despite this abuse of political prisoners, all observers interviewed agreed that non-political prisoners were physically brutalized a great deal more, and that beatings in Polish prisons were almost routine. The frequent drunkenness of the guards was given as one reason, particularly during holidays. Protests from non-political prisoners are rare, however, for the likelihood of a remedy is slight and the protest may backfire.

## Forced Feeding

Forced feeding of hunger strikers was described as particularly brutal by both Czeslaw Bielecki and Jerzy Kropiwnicki, each of whom had engaged in many such actions to protest prison conditions. Kropiwnicki wrote a book about his experiences as a hunger striker in which, as recounted by Michael Kaufman in *The New York Times*, he described the process as follows:

[T]he prison doctor shows the prisoner the authorization for force feeding.

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\* A letter smuggled out of prison by Frasyniuk and Piotr Bednarz dated December 9, 1983, described a particularly brutal series of events at Barczewo in December 1983. The letter is reprinted in Appendix II.

The prisoner asks whether he can drink the soup solution. "No," answered the doctor, "it must be poured into you through a tube." "You know I have an ulcer, you might damage my stomach," the prisoner said.

"Yes," said the doctor. "But such are regulations." He [Kropiwnicki] then describes how four guards forcibly tied his hands and placed a bit in his mouth through which the tube was rammed into his throat and into his shrunken stomach. After the feeding, he wrote, "I felt I had been raped. I raged in my cell and I felt I wanted to kill myself."\*

Andrzej Slowik, another Solidarity leader and, like Kropiwnicki, a hunger striker at Barczewo prison, smuggled out a letter dated April 13, 1984, in which he described his forced feeding as follows:

They (the prison guards) have been force-feeding us since Wednesday, April 11. Kropiwnicki swallows the stomach tube by himself. I refuse to be force-fed, so for the last 3 days I have been rendered helpless by first being handcuffed and then my mouth is forced open with the use of torture and a lever. I am using the word "torture" literally, because after sitting me in a chair, they trample on my toes and twist my arms and legs often in opposite directions so that those twisting my arms force me to straighten up and others, twisting my legs, make this impossible. Or they prop my legs down on the edge of the bed and one of them sits on my legs wrenching my knee sockets in the opposite directions. Or they press my shin bone, hard, against the edge of the bedframe. At the same time, others will wrench my head back and press hard on the jaw joints and a doctor or nurse goes to work on my jaws with forceps. When I start to scream, the prongs of the forceps are inserted between my teeth and then they have me. All they have to do is insert the stomach tube and pour the gruel in. Usually this will take 5 or

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\* The New York Times, August 20, 1986, p. A13.



6 functionaries as well as a doctor and a nurse. One of the nurses has progressed to torturing me. On 12 April 1984, she started to press very hard on my lymph nodes. This is very painful.\*

Bielecki, who holds the record for the longest such strike -- 11 months -- described the forced feeding similarly, also calling it "a physical and emotional rape." In April 1986, he wrote to the Director of the Rakowiecka Street Detention Center protesting his being force fed acidified milk, rancid fat and colored water during his hunger strike. His mother was not allowed to send him vitamins or other nutrients during the strike. He ended the action when his jaw was injured in one of the forced feedings.

### **Punishments, Including Punishment Cells**

Prisoners in the Polish prison system are punished not only with the conventional loss of such privileges as mail and visits, or separation from the regular prison population, but also by being subjected to painful tortures that verge on the medieval. The punishment cells themselves are often intolerable.

The most frequent form of severe punishment is the "hard bed," where an inmate sleeps only on several wooden slats. These are usually but not always in isolation punishment cells. Prisoners have also been subjected to a "belts" punishment. They are placed on a metal table in a cell sometimes called a "tiger's cage", which is dark and sound-proof. A three-part safety belt is then tightened around the chest, making it difficult to breathe; a doctor is supposed to be present during this and it is not supposed to last long. The first reaction is usually defecation and urination. According to one penologist, some prisoners have

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\* Coordinating Office Abroad of NSZZ "Solidarnosc," April 26, 1984.

died from this.\* Use of the "belts" is supposed to have been discontinued in 1980, but ex-prisoners have given conflicting reports about this.

Another punishment that is supposed to have ended but was prevalent during the 1981-86 period is head-shaving. Since this often provoked resistance, the operation often resulted in prisoners being beaten, and in some cases, having their eyes poked, and their legs and ankles twisted.

The punishment cells are often barbarous. Many are below ground, directly on the earth, and are therefore cold and damp, often filthy and insect-ridden. Water sometimes trickles in, and the wooden beds get wet.\*\* There is no toilet but only a bucket. In some, the furniture is fixed to the floor and immovable, but that is supposed to have ended. Frasyuniuk said that prisoners might stay in such cells for as long as six months.

The worst punishment cells are the "thermos" and the "kabaryna." The "thermos" has been described as a small, cold, sound-proof cell, two meters square, with a large plexiglass window and a peephole roughly 7 x 3 inches. There is no toilet or even bucket, and a prisoner must relieve himself on the floor. The room is under constant surveillance by a television camera, and a light is kept on all the time. There is very little air, and prisoners sometimes faint. The prisoner is stripped naked, and sometimes tightly handcuffed behind the back. The usual stay is 24 hours, but Frasyuniuk, who was in such a cell five times, was in once for three days. After a few hours of being handcuffed in this way, he told us, he experienced intense shoulder pains and his hands swelled.

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\* This is from an English translation of a scholarly and comprehensive 141-page anonymous study by Polish penologists of the 1981 uprisings in Polish prisons. The report is in the files of Helsinki Watch.

\*\* Uncensored Poland, "Law and Lawlessness," November 20, 1985.

The "kabaryna," in which some women political prisoners were confined at Fordon Prison for Women in 1983, was described as a cell equipped with only a stool fixed to the floor and a board folded against the wall that opens out to serve as a bed at night.\*

## Searches

In addition to the above authorized punishments, guards will often search cells and confiscate religious and other personal articles, tear mattresses and sheets, and mix together personal articles belonging to different people.

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\* Committee In Support of Solidarity, "Conditions in Prisons and Investigative Detention Centers in the Polish People's Republic," March 1, 1984.

## Activities

Other than work, there are few organized activities for Polish prisoners, since recreational and educational opportunities are negligible. Particularly troubling in a nation in which religion plays a very important role, most prison administrations discourage and interfere with religious observances.

### Work

Except for political prisoners, all prisoners are supposed to work. According to an underground newspaper study, prisoners are used for the most dangerous and lowest paid work. Although prisoners are supposed to be paid wages comparable to those in the outside world, they wind up with very little, for they are supposed to pay for their keep. They retain as little as 20 per cent in the most severe-regime prisons, and 30 per cent in the least severe regimes. Deputy Director Wrona admitted also that in 1986, 17 per cent of the prisoners earned nothing at all. He described the system as follows:

Indeed, it remains an open question the problem of paying those convicts who are employed as stokers, bakers, work in the laundry room or in repair workshop in the institution, in other words, provide their work to the penal establishment and do not receive wages. I would like to emphasize the word wages, because those convicts do receive monetary awards, whose amount during one year cannot be higher than four times the lowest monthly salary in state economy (28 thousand zloty in all). This money is deposited in full in their accounts. In addition, we tend to transfer these persons to paid work for a certain time prior to their scheduled release, so that they can make some money. The average pay in a penal institution is low because of the lack of professional qualifications, the considerable fluctuation and the low productivity and amounts to 11 thousand per month. But there are occupations (for example at railroad loading stations) where one is paid well, 30

and perhaps more thousand a month. I would also like to add at this point that the planned amendments of the executive penal code will increase from 20 to 25 per cent the lowest percentage of the wages which is deposited in the convict's account.\*

It is worth stressing that even those prisoners who earn the highest amounts usually receive only 20 or 25 per cent of their wages.

The low wages are a particular hardship, for prisoners must pay for extra food from these earnings. In an officially authorized and circulated *Solidarity* weekly, a former prisoner wrote of the 1981 conditions as follows:

The factory makes clothes. Work is divided into different stages, i.e. one person sews belts, somebody else quilts them, still another person sews pants legs, etc. The daily quota is 310 sets, with jackets. Not only the quota is very high, but the pay is actually horrifying. Namely, for a whole month of work, keeping to this quota, most workers make 1,500-1,800, of which as everybody knows, one gets only 20 per cent. Besides, in the summer we do not get any beverages and the stuffiness of the room makes one sweat and wipe it with one's sleeve. There is a terrible overcrowding. The machines are 2-3 or sometimes even only 1 meter, away from one another. [This is 1981, so the pay is probably a little higher now, but even by 1981 standards it is outrageously low.--Ed.]\*\*

Although the pay has increased somewhat since 1981, it is still very low. Work conditions are often very dangerous. Another prisoner wrote as follows:

Prisoners who worked with cement suffered terrible hunger. They took bread out of garbage containers, and they were punished for it. I got a hernia in the prison. At first, I was

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\* Polityka, June 6, 1987, op. cit.

\*\* Tygodnik Solidarnosc, No. 9, 1981, reprinted in the underground journal Praworadzność in a series "Prisons of the Polish People's Republic" that ran in issues 8 through 14.

employed doing allegedly light work. A year before the end of my sentence I was sent to work that required carrying heavy objects and I got a hernia on both sides. I went to see a doctor, he sent me for an operation. After the operation I got two weeks without work, and after that I had to carry heavy things again. The results came soon. The hernia on the operated side reappeared after only a month. Today, and I am still a young man, I am a cripple. I tried to sue them, but for the time being I can only talk about trying, because it is impossible to win.\*

## **Educational, Cultural and Recreational Opportunities**

One study found that 72 per cent of inmates did not participate in any educational or cultural activities and only 15 per cent participated actively; only 5 per cent were in sports activities, though every other prison is supposed to have volleyball facilities.

According to one expert, there are 150-200 inmates per "educator," a counselor who is supposed to help inmates on an individual basis to become rehabilitated;\*\*Deputy Director Wrona claims the ratio is closer to 100:1, hardly a significant difference. Moreover, there are indications that if the counselor becomes too zealous on behalf of the inmates, he or she risks dismissal.

Recreational possibilities are very meager. Walks, and ping pong for younger offenders, are all that are available. One study concluded that there were 115 prisoners per television set.

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\* Ibid.

\*\* Polityka, June 20, 1987, *op. cit.*

## Religion

Although the state is officially atheistic, the populace is very religious, with some 95 per cent belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. Many instances were reported of prison officials denying access to clergy, preventing inmates from listening to mass on the radio, and denying access to a prayer book or Bible. Zofia Romaszewska reported that in 1983, Mokotow prison authorities refused to allow prisoners to celebrate Christmas or Easter. To ensure that the detainees did not paint Easter eggs, the authorities served hard-boiled eggs with crushed shells. Others reported searches by guards in which religious articles like crosses were torn from the inmates, and pictures and Bibles destroyed.

One ex-prisoner reported that while there were political prisoners in the Polish prisons, everyone was allowed to go to weekly mass, but when the politicals were released, going to mass was stopped.

## **Contact With Others**

### **Outside**

#### **Family**

Family visits in the detention centers seem to be permitted once a month, though Maria Twardowska was allowed to receive her first visit from her mother only after three months confinement.\* As in many prison systems, family visits are considered a privilege that is revoked for punitive purposes.

#### **Mail**

Mail is often interfered with and sometimes held up for weeks and months. One ex-prisoner reported that the mail was sometimes mutilated and the prisoner received only half the letter; other prisoners reported that some mail never got through.

#### **Counsel**

Although the Polish Bar has retained its independence, there seems to be little contact between prisoners and counsel, especially during the pre-trial period. According to Tadeusz Wypych, a pre-trial detainee is not entitled to a defense lawyer until the investigation is completed. Jozef Sreniowski reported that when he was in Braniewo prison and was being punished for complaining, visits with his lawyer were cut to 10 minutes.

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\* Under Polish law, a prisoner can be held in incommunicado detention indefinitely, if the authorities decide that the investigation can benefit from it. As of this writing, one opposition activist, Kornel Morawiecki, has been held incommunicado for four months.



## Inside

When there were political prisoners, the prison authorities made an effort to isolate them from the others, except when they threw them into cells with some of the more dangerous offenders in the hope that the latter would abuse the politicals. Many ex-political prisoners complained of isolation, which even included rules against conversations with prison guards. According to Tadeusz Wypych, the worst aspect of prison was isolation; others like Joanna Szczesna, Jerzy Kropiwnicki and Jozef Sreniowski had the same complaint.

## **Remedies**

### **Help From Outside the Prison**

The Polish prison system has established a system of penitentiary judges who are supposed to monitor prison conditions and respond to prisoners' complaints. In the 1960's, they did indeed perform such a function but the prison authorities reacted negatively.

In 1970, a new, harsher Penal Code was promulgated, with the explicit purpose of reversing what the Ministry of Justice considered excessive concern for the rights of prisoners by the penitentiary judges. It is now widely agreed that the penitentiary judges do not protect prisoners against abuses.

For a while, outside visiting groups, some of which were church-related, served to check the prison system, but these are apparently no longer operative or effective. Indeed, it has become more and more difficult for scholars and penological experts to gain access to the prison system for academic and other studies, according to one prominent penologist.

The judicial system also provides no relief, and higher levels of prison administration are indifferent at best. Complaints will often bring nothing but reprisals. As a result, prisoners have virtually no significant way of obtaining redress for their problems and complaints.

Guards and prison officials, by remaining anonymous, make it difficult even to complain. They do not identify themselves by name plates or other insignia, but only by nicknames. Even high prison officials try to remain anonymous. Jerzy Kropiwnicki reported that when Radio Free Europe named some of the more abusive guards, "they were thrown into a panic."

It is also virtually impossible for prisoners to know or find out the applicable rules and regulations setting out their rights under the law. Although the Executive Penal Code, which governs prison administration, is available, it is in general terms, and the applicable regulations, which are scattered in many

### **Hunger Strikes**

Hunger strikes were used primarily by political prisoners. Some of these were very successful and achieved major improvements. Many of these improvements were quickly reversed, however, sometimes by new prison administrations. This sequence occurred in Leczyca in the Fall of 1985, when liberalizing measures were withdrawn only weeks after the administration agreed to improve things.

Some Solidarity ex-prisoners expressed doubts about the wisdom of hunger strikes, for they weaken the prisoner and can create grave risks to the prisoner's health. Others, however, believe it attracts great attention, and if entered into with full awareness of the dangers and the physical-emotional trauma of forced feeding, and with a determination to continue until the goal is achieved, it can be a very effective technique.

### **Passive Resistance**

Related to the hunger strike but much less dangerous, except for the inevitable harsh reprisals, is passive resistance -- a refusal to follow rules about such matters as folding clothing, covering the bed in a very specific way, putting towels outside the cell, and other rules which seem arbitrary. In one such protest, when the administration reacted with punishment, the inmates escalated their response with hunger strikes.

### **Demonstrations**

According to one report, from January 1981 to the beginning of December 1981, there were protests in at least 110 of 146 Polish penitentiary units, often several times within the same prison. One student of the demonstrations attributed them to the combination of abominable prison conditions and

the overall socio-political situation in Poland.\* Another penologist reported 276 group protests involving 40,000 prisoners, ranging from temporary work stoppages and hunger strikes to violent uprisings, in one of which, at Bydgoszcz prison, 188 inmates fled. In Kaminsko prison, two prisoners were killed trying to escape during a violent prison uprising. These seemed to produce some reform and a great deal of interest in the prison system, but with the release of the political prisoners, that reform impulse seems spent, though we were told that interest in prison reform is reviving.

In May 1987, there was another major prison riot at Potulice, a large prison apparently holding some 1,700 prisoners. When prisoners saw an inmate being bound and put into solitary confinement because he had complained about a theft from his cell, they started a loud protest; an increase in food prices was said to have aggravated tensions. The prisoners smashed windows and furniture and burned bedding. According to a report by a Solidarity leader, the administration responded with smoke bombs, and matters escalated. When the prisoners demanded better food and more space, riot police came and subdued them. The official reprisals were reportedly brutal: gauntlets, beatings, forcing prisoners to pick up broken glass with bare hands, and the like. Some prisoners responded by cutting themselves with razors.

## **Reform of the Penal Code**

During June 1987, we heard much about a possible reform of the Penal Code to improve prison conditions. No one knew, however, who was involved in the reform or what was under consideration.

In January 1988, Polish radio reported that a special commission had been discussing the changes in the penal law. The commission recommended

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\* From a 141-page anonymous study by Polish penologists of the 1981 uprising in Polish prisons. An English translation of this study is in the files of Helsinki Watch.

replacing outright imprisonment in some cases with restrictions of liberty and economic sanctions. (See also footnote on page 2.)

## **Conclusion**

The Polish prison system falls far short of the most minimal levels of decency. Significant reform seems possible, however, only if there is heavy outside pressure. The economic, attitudinal, educational and other problems are so great that it is unrealistic to expect a government in such serious economic difficulty as Poland to undertake so massive and difficult a task on its own. Outside pressure helped somewhat when world attention was drawn to the Solidarity members in prison. That attention must again be directed at what is a truly shameful prison system.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Summaries of Interviews with Former Prisoners**

The following are edited summaries of interviews with Solidarity members and others, most of whom had been imprisoned. The interviews were held in Warsaw (except for one in Wroclaw) during the week of June 19-25, 1987. Almost all of the people interviewed spoke in Polish, and the reports are therefore edited versions of translations of their remarks. Many of the reports were corroborated both by contemporaneous publications in underground newspapers and by virtually identical reports of the same event by different participants separately interviewed.

#### **Joanna Szczesna**

Joanna Szczesna was imprisoned twice, once in 1970 for a year for participating in an illegal organization and again in 1982 for some four months when she was charged with having another person's identity card, an internal passport. She talked to us in Warsaw, on June 20, 1987, about her 1982 experiences at Mokotow jail in Warsaw in the police lockup and in the prison section.

Normally one is held in a police lockup before being sent to a detention center for only about 48 hours. I was held for a week -- ostensibly because I had no papers -- but others were held much longer, some for as much as three months.

I was in a cell that measured about 16 feet by 13 feet and in which fourteen people were confined. Prisoners were moved in and out of this cell all night long, and so nobody was able to get any sleep. The place was absolutely filthy, and we could not take care of our hygienic needs. The only "toilet" was a bucket in the cell, and there was no toilet paper. Menstruating women were not given sanitary napkins, and had to use their own clothes. We were not allowed letters, parcels, visits

or private belongings of any kind, because the place was supposed to be only a transfer point.

The cells were also filled with bugs. We were not given any clean linens or blankets. I had to sleep on a plastic, hard slab that was about two inches thick that was brought in at night. These so-called "mattresses" were dirty and stained, and smelled terrible. Newcomers to the cell slept on the floor near the bucket. Everything about the place smelled, and it was hard to get the smell out of my nostrils even after I left.

The cell was very stuffy and hot and the ventilation was very poor. Even though it was July the windows were kept closed and when occasionally opened, this was only for a few inches because of the structure of the window which had a very small space between a wire front and the back. The food was very bad. For lunch we had only soup, and that was the big meal. In the morning and in the evening we just had some bread and lard or marmalade.

I am convinced that people were kept in there for a long time in order to pressure them to confess or to cooperate, since this is the time when people break. This was done not only to political prisoners but to all prisoners.

Medical care there was very bad. While I was there, one pregnant woman experienced pain, but got no help until the morning when she was taken away. Two of the nights that I was there, I could not get any sleep because two women, one of whom was very elderly and had trouble breathing because she had a heart problem, kept calling for help. The older woman was told that "this place is not a sanitorium." The other woman was pregnant. We were not permitted any medicines. Although I wanted my own medicine, I was not allowed to have it.

We got no exercise at all, not even a walk. We were body searched every time we were removed from the cell--we were strip-searched and had to squat. I was not allowed to see a lawyer and nobody even tried.

After a week I was moved to the main prison, and conditions improved. I had my own bed and a weekly bath in hot water, as well as a daily walk. There were two to four people in a cell



which measured about nine feet by four. In other parts of the prison, there were eight to twelve people in a cell and prisoners slept on mattresses on the floor. We political prisoners were mixed with serious offenders, in separate cells, in order to isolate the two groups, to keep them away from others. We were not allowed to talk to guards but could only communicate with them in writing. This isolation was one of the worst aspects of the prison experience.

Even though this part of the prison was better than the lock-up, the cells were still very stuffy and there were serious ventilation problems. We were able to pressure the authorities to remove part of the window.

The cells were not very clean, although there were no insects. The bedding and the clothing were usually dirty, but if you were lucky, you might get some clean items. When going for a walk, you would usually be given a dirty jacket. The food was better but still very meager. Many of the prisoners got food-poisoning. There were no fresh vegetables and sometimes the food, including a whole lunch, might be inedible.

Warm water was supposed to be provided daily, but it was often left outside, and would get cold. This also happened with food, because the guards waited until they had a large number of meals to deliver.

Mail was irregular and sometimes held up for as long as two months. Some mail never got through, and some was censored or torn. The regulations, however, allowed a weekly letter and one three-kilo parcel a month. I was allowed one visit during this period, which was a pretrial period. My lawyer tried to see me but he was not allowed to.

There was a prison hospital here, and I have no complaints about it. I did get a proper diet for my stomach ulcer and in the hospital the food was better than elsewhere.

I was punished once when I tried to communicate to another cell; I got three days in an isolation cell. There I slept on a blanket, with no mattress, on a "hard bed." I wasn't allowed cigarettes, or food from a parcel, and I had only a bucket for a toilet. I wasn't allowed to read, and the light was turned on and off during the night about once an hour.

Women could not get sanitary pads in the pretrial detention center either, although with special permission, we could get a special hygienic parcel of toothpaste and soap. The authorities could deny you parcels, however, and books from home were not allowed; the prison library, however, was not bad.

During August 1982, I was steadily interrogated for three weeks and the technique was the good-guy/bad-guy method. Once, I was threatened with long-term imprisonment, and I know of other women who were threatened in various ways. One woman was told that her children would be taken away and put in a home, and her husband would be forced to divorce her. I was not, however, physically abused.

One of the bad features of this institution, which was also common elsewhere, was that prisoners were often moved from one cell to another. When that happened, the cell was searched, everything in the cell was thrown together and mixed up, and sometimes prisoners' property was destroyed -- notes, letters and the like. This happened every week or so. That kind of search might also be made when a prisoner was out of her cell. Sometimes, a prisoner's things were "removed," for no good reason. It might be a needle or thread. Prisoners were sometimes told that they couldn't keep religious articles or family pictures.

There were also frequent disputes with the guards over the daily walks. Prisoners can't have watches and the guards would try to cut the daily walks from the regulation half-hour to ten or fifteen minutes. We would protest, but without a watch we couldn't prove anything and would be punished if we tried to stay on the walk longer.

### **Zbigniew Romaszewski**

Zbigniew Romaszewski is a Solidarity leader who spoke to us both about Solidarity problems and about prison conditions. He told us that after the 1986 amnesty, the authorities had begun to use administrative penalties for "political offenses," which impose serious financial burdens and can be handled through summary administrative trials.\* We talked to him and to his wife, Zofia Romaszewska, who was also active in Solidarity, in Warsaw on June 21.

About his prison experience, Zbigniew Romaszewski told us: I was in Mokotow prison from August 1982 through July 1984, during all of which time I was kept on a pretrial basis. Conditions worsened over this period because of the increase in the number of people imprisoned. When I first entered there were four to a cell and when I left, it was close to ten or twelve. In 1984, for example, I once saw twelve pairs of shoes in front of a cell when I was coming back from court. I was actually treated quite well during my two years there because I was a particularly prominent case. My wife Zofia was treated much worse.

### **Zofia Romaszewska**

I was arrested for working for Radio Solidarity. I was kept on a pretrial basis in Mokotow prison in 1982-83 for about 11 months. Because of a hunger strike I was shifted for two more months to Fordon prison, after which I was released.

In Mokotow I was confined with murderers, psychopathic types and some very mentally feeble people. I was not frightened by them, because I felt in control of the situation most of the time. I am convinced, however, that I was deliberately put in a cell with particularly unpleasant people,

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\* These summary procedures are discussed in detail in Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Repression Disguised As Law: Human Rights in Poland*, pp. 9-15 (1987).

such as a prostitute who had killed another prostitute, and an informer about economic crimes.

The cell in Mokotow was very stuffy. Health care was very poor. A woman in my cell had pains during the night that were ignored, partly because the doctors were drunk. Lights were switched on and off during the night but I got used to it.

While there, I went on a hunger strike to protest being kept there. This was successful, and I was transferred to Fordon prison. There I had more opportunities to contact other prisoners and to take longer walks. I was also treated better than I had been elsewhere, the cells were less stuffy, with windows that opened, and there were usually just three people in a cell. I also did not have to endure the weekly searches that took place in Mokotow, where the guards would tear the mattresses apart and remove legal papers and notes. There were, however, no organized activities.

Fordon prison is no longer used for women.

#### **Maria Twardowska**

Maria Twardowska was imprisoned in Mokotow prison from April 13, 1985, to September 12, 1986, for work on behalf of Solidarity. We talked to her and her husband, Czeslaw Bielecki, on June 21, 1987.

I was interrogated very intensively. They were very harsh toward me especially at the beginning. They threatened to put me in a cell with rats, and at one point, I was forced to stand on one leg for an hour, next to a chair. The interrogators shouted in my face with vulgarities about my husband\*, and although I wasn't actually hit, they tried to hang me by the shoulders of my blouse. I am a big woman, however, and they could not do it.

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\* The interrogators, among other things, used anti-Semitic epithets with regards to Bielecki (*Tygodnik Mazowsze*, No. 156, January 30, 1986).

They questioned me both morning and afternoon, for about two months in May and June 1985 and somewhat less often after that.

As for the prison itself, the baths that we used were dirty and in terrible condition. The bedding and towels were filthy, smelly and gray. I kept my own clothing and after fighting for about a year, I was given some new towels and bedding in July 1986.

After three months, I was allowed a visit from my mother and after that, my mother or my sister was allowed to visit me about once a month.

I came in with kidney problems and developed a stomach ulcer. After months of complaining, in October 1985, I was able to get a special diet of milk and butter for my ulcer. I was not allowed to use my own kidney medicine, however. I was told that a doctor would consult with me about my kidney problem, but that never happened.

I was moved from my cell quite frequently, to cut off any associations with other prisoners. Guards searched the cell, and made a terrible mess, sometimes taking things. Later, however, I got my personal belongings back.

The worst part of it was the isolation, the denial of any contact with other inmates or other people. The guards were not supposed to talk to the prisoners, although often they did, and I in fact did talk to guards.

### **Czesław Bielecki**

Bielecki is one of the most prominent Solidarity writers and publishers and holds the record for the longest hunger strike -- 11 months. He was in prison three times, and the third time he was kept isolated, most of the time under special scrutiny. He spoke to us briefly about his experiences, which are set forth in some detail in various newsletters and reported in the main report.

I was force-fed twice a day during my 11-month hunger strike, which was unprecedented. The force-feeding was done very brutally. My jaw-hinge was locked and they forced it open. After my case became very prominent, I was safer, but I was very weak.

Beating people is very common. During my second stay I was stripped and beaten with clubs, in front of my sons. The third time I was put in a cell with a thief, who I could see had also been beaten.

### **Jozef Sreniowski**

Jozef Sreniowski is a sociologist who is a former KOR\* member. In December 1981, he was detained for a month in Leczyca prison, after which he was transferred to another jail from which he escaped in August 1982; from October 24, 1984, to September 1986, he was again imprisoned and was altogether in five different prisons. During his 1981 stay, he was never charged with a crime or told what the charge was. In 1984, after the death of Father Jerzy Popieluszko, he was arrested for carrying documents that were said to be a threat to the security of the nation, in violation of Penal Code Art. 273(1). He told us about his 1984-1986 experiences in Lodz, Braniewo and Leczyca.

In 1984 I was in a pretrial facility at Lodz, where I stayed for five months until March 1985. I was put in a special section run by the security service, together with non-political prisoners including smugglers, bribers, and embezzlers. There were only six beds for some seven to nine people in a cell about 23 square meters. At one point, I was put into a cell with very young offenders. One of them, a retarded boy, told me that he was tortured by having his genitals crushed by a drawer. The boy had been charged with theft but had refused to confess.

I also saw other people beaten. They were tied to a radiator and then hit in order to make them confess. These beatings were done by the interrogation officers and occasionally by

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\* KOR, Workers' Defense Committee, the most significant pre-Solidarity opposition group in Poland, formed in 1976 by a group of intellectuals in response to the government's repression against workers who participated in June 1976 in economically motivated strikes. KOR announced its dissolution during the Solidarity national congress in the fall of 1981.

the guards. I know of other such beatings because I often saw bruises on prisoners' bodies.

In one case, in November 1984, a twenty-six-year-old in the cell with me was told to sign a statement that he had seen his own file. He refused, and the guards went at him -- one guard hit him in the stomach very hard, another hit him in the neck, and a third hit him with heavy keys that were about nine inches long. I tried to defend the man and the guards finally left.

Cell mates told me that two boys died during this period because they were not given prompt medical aid. One of them, Pawel Stencel, had asthma, which he developed at Lodz. The doctor kept postponing a hospital transfer until after Christmas. Five days before Christmas, however, the boy was taken to an isolation cell and then brought back to the cell with the others. He said that he had been "mistreated" but there were apparently no marks. The boy, however, did not seem to be in his right mind when he came back and the prison medic gave him a sedative. His cell mates then went for their walk, leaving him alone. When they returned they found him dead. The cell was closed, the prisoners were transferred to a different cell and for a couple of days the guards behaved better. The guards generally drank heavily, but for a few days, there was no drinking. As far as I know, nothing has ever been done about this.

In Lodz, there was not enough food and inmates were often hungry. What food there was, was unsanitary and almost all the prisoners got food-poisoning. There were no vegetables, no dairy products and the meat was only grease.

There was a toilet in the cell but no brush and no washing powder. The cell was very dirty and there was no toilet paper. I was unable to take a bath for some five weeks and so I had lice in my genitals; six out of the eight or more people in this cell had some kind of skin disease. Blankets were not washed.

It was very cold that winter and the cells were barely heated. Before Christmas a window was washed and the glass broke. Although it was -27 degrees Centigrade outside, the window was not fixed for two weeks. Some people developed pneumonia and I heard about tuberculosis cases; the TB cases

were moved out and the pneumonia cases were moved to a special cell. There were people with diabetes, eye diseases, and epilepsy but there was no medical care nor medicines. One of the epileptic prisoners lost two teeth when it was necessary to open his mouth with a spoon. Our only exercise was a daily walk for about fifteen minutes, for which we were given no hats or gloves, despite the cold.

In March 1985, I was transferred to Braniewo, a small prison with about 200-250 sentenced prisoners who had sentences up to ten years. The head of the prison, Major Piotr Kosciuczuk, was a very punitive man known as "Hitler," whom even the guards feared. The prison, however, was clean and the food was fairly good.

In this prison, the political prisoners were treated differently from the others. We were on a separate corridor and there were only three of us to a cell. The cells, however, were very small, no more than 6 or 7 meters square. The beds were bunk beds and the exercise was a forty minute walk in a cage.

Discipline was very severe. Prisoners could sit only on the stools, not on the beds. I broke the rules often, and after being warned, I was put in a "hard-bed" cell for a week. While there, my mail was stopped, I got no visits, and my meeting with my lawyer was cut to ten minutes.

We were subjected to body searches whenever we left the cell. The cells were searched daily and our belongings were often messed up. Some things were actually destroyed such as notes, privately owned books, and the like. Mattresses and seams on clothing, shoes and slippers were cut open. I was told by the non-political prisoners that they were beaten, but political prisoners were not.

The abusive searches resulted in a hunger strike around Easter 1985 and the searches stopped for a while. Together with another prisoner, I did a second hunger strike to end the isolation of a priest named Father Sylwester Zych. Our strike lasted for eighteen days and finally Father Zych was given a cell mate.

In June 1985, I was transferred to Leczyca, where I was put into a large round cell with six political prisoners. There I was



beaten twice. Once was when we political prisoners were taken for a walk, and tried to walk in an area that we weren't supposed to be in; we were hit with fists and kicked and dragged to our cells. Wladyslaw Frasyniuk and I were considered the ring-leaders, and we were each placed in a dirty isolation cell that was usually kept for drunks. All the furniture was fixed to the floor and the beds were "hard-beds." The toilet was dirty, the cell was wet and full of bugs, and it was all very smelly. The cell was below floor level and there was no basement below it, so it was very cold even though this was summer time. I went on a hunger strike and others joined to help out. The authorities told the others that if the strike stopped, Frasyniuk and I would be released and the strike ended. We were not, however, released.

Shortly after, the authorities instituted a more liberal regime, but this was withdrawn a few weeks later. The authorities then decided to replace the windows with plexiglass and since many of the cells were under the roof, this would make them very hot and stuffy. There were two political cells at this time, containing nine people. The authorities took the strongest from each cell and promised them a luxurious single cell, TV and other privileges if they would not defend themselves or their friends in case force was used about a possible protest against the plexiglass. They refused to cooperate.

The plexiglass construction began on September 25, 1985. A number of guards went to the two cells and we considered barricading ourselves. Forty massed guards entered our cell, led by a Captain Stasinowski, and told us to leave the cell voluntarily. When we refused, the guards rushed at us with folded towels, which they placed around our necks. We tried to stand together defensively, but they got the towels around our necks and squeezed. When we started to shout, other towels were put in our mouths. I began to shout "Frasyniuk is being hurt." Several of us, including Frasyniuk and myself, were taken to isolation cells. The remaining political prisoners started to shout to let everybody know. On the way to these cells, we were beaten with hands, shoes and towels by three to six guards massed on each prisoner. Our ankles were twisted harshly, and two of us were taken to the prison hospital because of the

ankle twistings. A specialty of this prison was twisting genitals, of which Frasyński and two others were victims.

After this incident, relations with prison authorities eased a bit. During this time the prison head had been away but when he came back he put those of us in isolation back into three-person cells and put specially armed guards near us.

On October 2, 1985, the political prisoners were forced to shave. I saw some beaten and forcibly shaved. Mirosław Andrzejewski, a twenty-one-year-old math student, was thrown to the floor and was in a state of shock. There were shoe marks on his back from a harsh kick. His clothes and underwear were torn and he had a black eye and blood above the eye.

We continued our protest and three days later, during the evening, as we shouted and sang, guards entered the cell and tried to drag one of the prisoners out. When I and Andrzejewski tried to stop this, the guards squeezed my throat, kicked me in the spine and again threw me in an isolation cell. This was during the sixth or seventh day of the hunger strike, so I was quite weak. As a result of this assault, my spine was hurt badly, and I have a chronic back and disc problem. I heard that others were treated similarly, although I didn't personally see that. A doctor saw me sometime later, but said nothing.

Political prisoners were kept in isolation cells at this time for some two weeks, but because of my hunger strike, I was kept in longer.

A penitentiary judge came to investigate but he only blamed the prisoners. At the end of October, Frasyński was transferred to Lubsko.

In November 1985, there was another period of liberalization. We demanded the return of a friend who had been sent to Łódź, but this was refused and we began another hunger strike. The liberalization lasted only one month, however.

## **Tadeusz Wypych**

Tadeusz Wypych was in prison from 1982 through 1985, charged with "subverting the regime" under article 282A\* of the penal code for possessing an offset printing press. During this time he was at Mokotow prison in Warsaw and in Leczyca. His worst experience was at Leczyca, where he was for some five months from July 27, 1985, to December 5, 1985.

The situation at Leczyca was very unstable, constantly changing at the whim of the prison manager. There was always a struggle between the prisoners and the administration. Although I never saw anybody beaten, I did see people after they had been beaten, such as Jozef Sreniowski, Wladyslaw Frasyniuk and Andrzej Filipczyk. As far as I knew, political prisoners were beaten less than others, though there were some beating incidents to stop the prisoners' demands for improvements, some of which were granted in August 1985 but were taken away in September 1985. There were nine political prisoners at this time and we tried to negotiate. When this failed, we sang songs and refused to follow the rules.

I know of two beating incidents. In one, [probably in September 1985] prisoners were forcibly removed from their cells and their ankles badly twisted. I was told they were also struck, but I did not see any actual punchings. The second time [probably October 1985] was when an effort was made to forcibly shave the political prisoners, and they refused. The officials poked the prisoners' eyes, and twisted their legs and hands. The politicals were in two-person cells at this time and some fifty guards were assigned to each cell for this purpose.

The food at Leczyca tasted bad and was of very poor quality. The cells were very badly ventilated, especially those cells

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\* Article 282A prohibits "activities with the intent of inciting public disturbance or unrest" and carries a three-year maximum penalty. The opportunities for repression created by Art. 282A are discussed in Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Repression Disguised As Law: Human Rights in Poland*, pp. 15-23 (1987).

in trade union activities, he was sentenced to six years in prison and four years loss of civil rights. He was considered a "dangerous" prisoner and was constantly transferred, almost always in handcuffs. He was also barred from working, and kept in a special section of the prison where he was denied access to his family and prohibited from using the canteen. We interviewed him on June 24, 1987, in Wrocław.

The worst institution was Barczewo, where I served from September 1983 to May 1984. It is a very tough place. The prison had been built by Germans for very difficult prisoners and it was overcrowded. Any kind of misbehavior was severely punished and the guards did not hesitate to hit prisoners for a "bad attitude." I was kept in isolation much of the time from December 1983 through May 1984 and often in handcuffs because of my protests.

At first, I was confined in cells with murderers, because the officials figured we would not get along and the other prisoners would mistreat me. It didn't work out that way, and I was later moved in with the political prisoners.

The political prisoners section had no running water, so that water was limited to two buckets per cell daily. It was very cold in the winter, especially in the cells on the ground floor because the floor boards were directly on the earth. Cells for two people were now used for four. The medical care at the institution was terrible.

At Barczewo, I was frequently beaten and put in an isolation cell in which everything was rigidly fixed, and where I was often handcuffed for several days, except for meals. I was also put in a "thermos cell" at Barczewo for about 15 days -- twice for 5 days and twice with two other people in a very tiny cell. These cells are so stuffy that after one day, one of the prisoners fainted, a man with heart disease. On the third day, one is so weak that one cannot even walk in the cell and it is hard to breathe. These cells have no windows and double walls and the inner wall is made of plexiglass and not permeable. When you are handcuffed behind your back for several days, you develop terrible shoulder pains and your hands swell up. As a result I developed long term problems with my joints and I still have problems with my shoulders and with my knees.

Barczewo was so damp that one could see the line of damp on the cell wall. Straitjackets were used, and some people fainted while in them -- I fainted twice in a straitjacket. Tear gas was often used on political prisoners. In one incident it was used three times in the same cell.

In Barczewo the political prisoners did not have a recreation room. After a long period of protest we were allowed one television set for all of us, to be viewed once a week.

I was jailed in Wroclaw on three separate occasions for periods of three months to one week. I was first confined there, when I was arrested in October 1982. Because of my Solidarity activities I was labelled "dangerous" and put in a special cell in which the windows and doors were barred and blocked. There was almost no air. The beds, tables and chairs were all fixed to the floor. During the winter the cell was very cold. It was about eight square meters, and contained four people. Non-political criminals at Wroclaw were usually confined six to eight people in such a cell, which produced serious psychological problems, often resulting in self-mutilation with razors and glass. I saw some of the non-political prisoners being beaten, as well as marks and bruises on many others. One mentally disturbed prisoner, who shouldn't have been there in the first place, provoked the other prisoners to hurt him and he was often beaten by the guards.

Some of my mail was intercepted, although I did get some letters. I received a visit only after three months. Although I was not physically abused at Wroclaw, I experienced a great deal of verbal abuse.

From 1983 to 1986 the food got steadily worse in all the prisons. At lunch in Wroclaw, for example, we had only soup and at other times only bread and margarine. Exercise was limited to thirty-minute walks, and even this was often cut to ten minutes, and sometimes prisoners were denied the right to walk altogether. We were allowed only one bath a week and a change of bedding only once every two weeks. The clothing was very skimpy. In winter, for example, a prisoner received only a shirt and a pair of pants. Special permission was required to get more. There was a serious problem of

inmate-inmate security, sometimes stirred up by the guards. There was also some male prostitution and a serious drug problem coming from an abuse of some of the medicine. Alcoholism was very widespread.

There were some 800-1,000 prisoners at Wroclaw, many of whom had no work. This produced a lot of self-mutilation and aggressiveness. There was also a shortage of cigarettes and tea. The only recreation was an hour-long walk and TV twice a week.

I was in Leczyca four times, the first time in 1983. This is an old, 400-person dilapidated prison which is very damp because it is on wet ground. The ground-floor cells are so damp that it was cold even in summer. I was denied warm clothes, to punish me.

The cells are very large, and sometimes there is only one tiny window, so there is not enough light. Usually twenty people are put in a cell and sometimes forty to fifty. The windows have a solid glass screen and when the temperature is more than 18 degrees centigrade, the heat gets so bad and the ventilation so poor that some people faint. During one particularly hot summer people were transferred to other prisons and doors were opened, but this didn't help very much because the windows were so small. The dampness and the lack of air are the worst aspects of this prison; I developed rheumatism because of the dampness. Exercise was nothing more than a walk in a small, wire-enclosed cage.

Unlike Barczewo, the doctors at Leczyca were generally sympathetic to political prisoners, but not to the ordinary criminals. Nevertheless, the medical care was very poor because there was only one paramedic and two doctors who commuted twice a week. Tuberculosis was very common.

Punishment included cutting off outside visits and mail. At one point I was given two weeks on a "hard-bed" in an isolation cell that was about three square meters. The walls were so thick that the windows couldn't be opened. There was no toilet, but just a bucket. The light bulb was outside the door and light came in through a hole in the door. Punishment in this cell could last for six months. I was in there several times

for up to 14 days. Books were permitted. Political prisoners managed to survive this, but the others often broke down and either mutilated themselves, or became withdrawn upon their return to the cell.

At Leczyca, prisoners feel desperate, humiliated and helpless. There were frequent beatings and assaults of criminal offenders. In one case a man who had tried to hang himself was dragged down some steps. If a protest formed in a cell a large group of guards would come in and beat everyone in the cell, which happened, for example, during hunger strikes. The guards kicked and clubbed the prisoners who refused to eat with fists, keys, and feet, while shouting at them. In some cases the beatings seemed timed and systematic.

In July 1983, while at Leczyca, I was very harshly beaten and had my genitals twisted. We political prisoners decided to protest about the other prisoners being beaten so much. We began to yell, and it had some effect for the guards stopped the beating for a while.

A few days later, however, I and one of the non-political prisoners were pulled out, charged with being leaders, and given fourteen days on a "hard-bed." I refused to go. I was dragged out into the corridor, and remained limp. It looked as if some 60 guards were in the corridor. Four held me tight, and a fifth, behind me, twisted my genitals. I continued to suffer pain from this for two years afterward. I was carried some twelve meters and thrown against the wall, handcuffed behind my back and my arms twisted painfully. I was then taken to a doctor, who did not even examine me. I filed a complaint and asked for a penitentiary judge and the procurator to look into the matter. When they came, the only thing they wanted to know was how this information had gotten out to Radio Free Europe.

Others also suffered this genital twisting, including Tadeusz Wypych and Krzysztof Gos.

In August and September 1985, when I was again at Leczyca, I was again assaulted by the guards. This grew out of a conflict that had originally started in 1983, when the prisoners had broken some of the screens in the windows to get some air. In

1985 a new manager at the prison decided to fix the screens and put in plexiglass, producing more conflict. At one point I was thrown against an iron bed by guards and then taken to an isolation cell where I developed breathing problems on the second day, and had trouble with my right arm. A doctor examined it, but refused to order an X-ray. He told me that the pain would last for months, and suggested injections. I refused, because I was afraid they might use psychotropic drugs, which had been used on other prisoners.

In October-November 1985, I was taken to Lodz. I was put in an isolation cell and five drunken guards beat me up and kicked me. One of the prisoners who heard this cried out "Solidarity is being beaten up." The non-political prisoners started to yell, and this halted the beating.

In November 1985, I was taken to Lubsko prison where I was denied visits or parcels from my family or my lawyers. I was beaten a few times and once very hard. There was no coal at the prison, and the place was especially cold. Punishments at Lubsko involved placing a prisoner in the coldest cell in the prison, without warm clothing. I was put in one of these cells, and after 14 days taken for a warm bath. After I was in the bath for a time, cold water was turned on. I was left in the cold bath, with soap on my body. It was a very cold day, about -20 degrees centigrade. Icy water was then turned on. When I complained about this I was then put in isolation for another 30 days. Because of all this, I suffered a serious inflammation of my joints.

At this prison, as elsewhere, I was constantly humiliated. I was stripped every time I left my cell. When I refused to be searched, I was denied visits.

After Chernobyl, we suddenly got lots of milk and vegetables.

With respect to conditions in Polish prisons in general, there are:

**Beatings.** Ordinary criminal prisoners are often beaten as preventive measures, but political prisoners less so because of their notoriety.



Self mutilation. This is a very serious problem in Polish prisons. It is not suicidal, but rather a protest. It was often successful, resulting in a transfer to a different prison. It included such things as nailing one's genitals to a bench and other bizarre and grotesque acts.

Religion. Though all prisoners have a right to go to mass every week, only some are permitted to go and usually only every second week. As a result of a protest by political prisoners at Leczyca, everyone was allowed to go every week, but after the amnesty, when the political prisoners left, this stopped. Also priests are not allowed into most prisons today. In pre-trial facilities, no religious services are allowed.

Since the prison is supposed to be secular, in many of the non-political prisoners' cells religious pictures and other religious items are destroyed. The non-political prisoner is not usually allowed to wear a crucifix. Though all of the political prisoners wore them, I had mine torn off twice.

Searches. During the prisoners' walks, the cells are often searched and messed up. Food is often mixed up with other things and made inedible, and personal property is often taken or destroyed. There are also periodic strip searches, particularly at holiday time.

### **Jerzy Kropiwnicki**

Jerzy Kropiwnicki is a Solidarity leader from Lodz. He was imprisoned from 1982 through 1984 and served in Lodz, Mokotow, Hrubieszow, and Barczewo. He talked to us in Warsaw, June 25, 1987, primarily about hunger strikes.

It is very difficult to find out what rules govern in the prisons. There are many administrative rules but these are never published, and are treated as confidential. For example, there is no way to find out what the health care regulations are, and practices vary from doctor to doctor. Rights depend not on status but on behavior, and consequently political prisoners during 1981-84 tried to insist that the privileges not be handed out arbitrarily or as punitive measures, but according to status

or legal categories or rights. This was the issue during my 57-day hunger strike in Barczewo and elsewhere.

What was granted to the political prisoners influenced what others received. The guards and other prison administrators were particularly nervous about the world spotlight on the political prisoners and the fact that they were often specifically named on Radio Free Europe. The guards tried to hide their names behind nicknames and the like, and even the prison directors would not reveal their names. With few or no political prisoners now in prison, things have gotten worse for others.

The political prisoners decided that we would not accept any prison rules that were not related to the valid purposes of a prison, such as security or isolation from society. Consequently arbitrary rules like the prohibition on sitting or lying on the bed during the day, or the requirement that clothing be folded a certain way or put outside the cell, or that towels be put outside the cell, were ignored and disobeyed by the political prisoners. When the prison administration reacted with punishments, including putting a political prisoner on a "hard bed", as happened in September 1982 at Mokotow, we decided to go on a hunger strike.

Barczewo is one of the worst prisons and was "intolerably repressive." This was the place where many hunger strikes began.

When there is a hunger strike, the prison administration is supposed to find out the reason. It must then weigh the prisoner daily, take his pulse and blood pressure, and have him examined by a doctor. After eight days, the prison administration usually tries to persuade the prisoner to stop. If this fails, the doctor decides whether or not the prisoner will be force-fed, subject to the prisoner's veto. After 11 days, however, the prisoner must be force-fed. After 18 days, fundamental changes in the organism begin. As a matter of course there is usually no force-feeding during the first 18 days. In my 57-day strike in the Spring of 1984, the forced-feeding started only after 21 days.

Forced-feeding is like a rape, physically and emotionally. I was surrounded by guards and a tube was forced in. The only time I ever seriously contemplated suicide was right after I was force-fed -- I felt deprived of everything.

During the eighth day of my hunger strike, I was put into a "thermos box." Although the cell is not big enough for one person, I was in there for 24 hours with another. A light was kept in my eyes 24 hours a day, and there was no air.

After a hunger strike is over, there is a serious problem about how to resume eating. A special very light diet is necessary, and there must be some medication. Some prisons, however, provide the prisoners only with heavy food, like hard-boiled eggs, potatoes, meat and heavy soups. This can create very serious problems.

Hunger strikes exact a very high human cost, but if the prisoner is determined to go all the way, they can be very effective. The prisoner dare not, however, waver. The prisoner must know what he wants and do what he must. In a Polish prison you cannot resign without victory, for then you risk everything -- you are likely to get the wrong kind of food, and may be subjected to further repression.

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Reported Beating Incidents and Other Examples of Inhuman Treatment**

**Zofia Romaszewska: Letter to Parliament on Situation in  
Warsaw Mokotaw Prison, May 1983**

The mildest of disciplinary punishments, easily given, is the cancellation of food vouchers of the 3-kilo food parcels, often immediately cancelled for two months at a stroke. During the investigation period such a card is given to a detainee once a month. In the period when there are an increasing number of conflicts not necessarily drastic the most usual punishment is 7 to 14 days in a "punishment cell." This is an isolated cell with bare boards to sleep on. Such a cell is cold, one does not receive warm water there, and there is not even than [sic] uncomfortable stool. One has to sit on a narrow shelf protruding from the wall, and one is not allowed to sit even on the boards of the bunk. During the day blankets are taken out into the corridor. During the night there can be no clothes or undergarments left in cell. "Punishment cells" to which inmates from Block III are most often sent are in another building, in a solitary confinement block. There is no sewage disposal, instead there are cast-iron pails, which have no handles and are difficult to carry. Cells are arranged in such a way that a prisoner cannot attack a warder. There are internal bars, the so-called "tigers," near the door and window, and food is supplied through a special opening in the bars, on a shovel; sweeping brushes have no handles, nor has the bucket. No sickness prevents the execution of the punishment. The part played by the prison doctor who, theoretically, has to give his permission for a prisoner to be sent to bare boards punishment cells, is merely instrumental. Even if the doctor protests against sending the sick person to the punishment cell the punishment

is executed immediately anyway. Open duodenal ulcers, kidney inflammation, spinal pains or female indispositions, even a simple cold, does not exempt one from this punishment. Suspension of the punishment, particularly punishment of this kind, is impossible because it is immediately executed. The procedure of appeal against it lasts much longer than the punishment itself.

*From Uncensored Poland, No. 18/83*

**Polish Helsinki Committee's Report to the UN Commission on Human Rights, March 1984, published in English by the U.S. Helsinki Watch and the New York Committee in Support of Solidarity, September 1984.**

Political prisoners at Barczewo Prison went on a hunger strike for 18 days in October 1983. As a result of the strike, the appalling prison conditions and the behavior of the prison staff towards political prisoners improved somewhat. On December 4, trouble began again when Jerzy Kropiwnicki, who was about to receive a visit from his family, was subjected to a brutal body search. Since December 5, 1983 the prison staff has been deliberately provocative. Wladyslaw Frasyuniuk and Piotr Bednarz described the situation at Barczewo in a letter smuggled out of prison, dated December 9, 1983. They wrote:

On December 5, we were suddenly divided up into two groups during our exercise period. We protested this separation and demanded an explanation from the prison's warden why he was violating our earlier agreements. Instead of explaining his decision, the prison staff brought out fire hoses and tried to drive us out of the exercise yard with two lines of water. But the water pumps broke so the prison guards, led by the Guard Commander, Captain Kluza, attacked the prisoners: Edmund Baluka, Patrycjusz Kosmowski, Piotr Bednarz, and Wladyslaw Frasyuniuk. This "humanitarian use of force" was supervised by Major Lisowski, the deputy warden of the prison. We were beaten and forced back into our cells.

While we had been out in the exercise yard, our colleagues overheard what was going on and tried to intervene to prevent further violence. Leszek Moczulski and Tadeusz Stanski demanded an interview with the warden and that they, along with Andrzej Slowik and Jerzy Kropiwnicki, be allowed to join those taking exercise so as to put all political prisoners together. The response was immediate. Several guards, who were waiting for the prisoners in the exercise yard to return, beat up Moczulski and Stanski.

Back in our cells, we demanded to see a doctor since Piotr Bednarz had suffered serious hand injuries. Upon getting no response, we started to bang on the cell door. At this, the warders dragged Slowik out of our cell and placed him in an isolation cell. We increased the noise. After two hours, a physician appeared. The warden promised Moczulski that Slowik would be returned to their cell. A "cease-fire" existed until the next morning, when the warden had agreed to meet with our representatives. On December 6, Szeremietiew and Kropiwnicki met with the warden, who "explained" the reasons for the order to beat up political prisoners. Warden Lutrzykowski said it had been done at this personal order.

Another meeting was to take place the following day; instead, the prisoners were again attacked by the guards, this time under the command of Lutrzykowski himself. We were beaten, dragged into our cold cells, stripped, and searched. All our possessions, except for prison property, were confiscated: warm clothing, notes, knives, and even prayer books. Our memorabilia were removed. Food and diet accessories were taken away. We consider this an act of theft (Article 210 of the Polish Penal Code). We were informed that we were to be totally separated from our colleagues. The situation has remained the same.

We are threatened with incarceration in isolation cells and with beatings; we are reported for talking to prisoners in the adjacent cell, for refusing to get up from our beds for roll call, and for failing to stand up and state our names when a guard enters the cell. The prison staff does its best to "make things nice for us" in Barczewo. For instance, today we were offered a bath in the same facility where prisoners suffering from hepatitis have been bathing. We refused, but were taken nowhere else to bathe. The cells are extremely cold, and most of us are ill. In protest, we have refused to place our clothes "properly folded" at the cell door, or to go out for exercise periods. We have also started a rotating hunger strike. In our view, these actions are a planned and deliberate campaign against us.

We wish to add that the cellblock (XIV) where we are being held is isolated and used for repressive purposes. It is a building separated from all other prisoners. At present, the controls are extremely thorough, with fixed cameras and reinforced guard detachments for continuous observation. The cells are No. 18 (Moczulski, Stanski, Szeremietiew), No. 16 (Slowik and Kropiwnicki), No. 14 (Bednarz and Frasyniuk), and No. 12 (Baluka and Kosmowski).

The rotating hunger strike has brought no changes; the repression and harassment continue. On December 31, 1983, Jerzy Kropiwnicki wrote a letter to the Polish Primate, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, in which he stated:

For us, the beginning of the New Year is sad. The warden, Lutrzykowski, has taken additional steps to break our resistance and make life as difficult as possible. On December 27, he appeared in our cellblock for the first time in several weeks. He called us into the duty room individually and disciplined us for "breaking prison regulations." It is obvious that he is following a prearranged plan. Some of us have been denied the right to send and receive letters for two months; others are told that they will not be able to

see their families. This kind of punishment has nothing to do with different "offenses," which are the same in all our cases. No doubt it is a primitive but hopeless effort to sow discord among us.

On December 28, the prison guards conducted a "general search of cells and prisoners." Several of us refused to leave the cell for fear of being robbed and were forcibly carried out of their cells. We were forcibly taken back into the cells after the search. It was later learned that the purpose of the search was to deprive us of what was left of our personal belongings (watches, foreign language textbooks, dictionaries, notes, and personal copies of books, both fiction and scientific). All of our belongings were confiscated. Obviously such malicious repression will not force us to alter our position: we will still refuse to take exercise and to put out our clothes, nor will we attend reveille or roll calls. (The last point is not an element of protest but our usual behavior; under no circumstances are we going to attend roll-calls willingly.)

We are continuing the rotating hunger strike. . . The problem of baths remains unresolved. I spoke of this specific problem to the penitentiary judges, and I was informed that: 1) prisoners suffering from hepatitis had used the facility only one week earlier; 2) the warden, Lutrzykowski, had promised to prepare another bathing facility for those suffering from infectious diseases; 3) that he also promised to have the bathing facility disinfected by a qualified agency and to show us the certificate of disinfection; and 4) that until that time, we were promised another bathing facility. In the meantime: 1) we have not been provided with another bathing facility; 2) talk about the disinfection of the infected facility is mixed with reports that prisoners suffering infectious diseases are using the bath. Consequently, none of us has taken a bath for a month. -- Jerzy Kropiwnicki



## Hunger Strike at Strzelin Prison

... Lately prison functionaries have been subjecting political prisoners to harsh and degrading treatment. For example, they have denied political prisoners family visits without justification; the prisoners have been called out one by one into the corridor and ordered to expose their genitals, which the functionaries then examine with their bare hands; the prisoners are also ordered to do knee-bends with their genitals still exposed in the face of shouts, curses, and threats of beatings. Two of the prisoners, Stanislaw Zabielski and Leszek Zubik began a hunger strike to protest this treatment on September 22, 1984. The others will wait to see if this brings about any changes. If it does not, then they too will join the hunger strike.

From *Hutnik* [Polish underground newspaper],  
No. 17/89, October 9, 1984

[As a result of our hunger strike, begun December 22, 1984], Andrzej Pokorski was held in an isolation cell. On December 25, 1984, his medicines, even vitamins and an opiatek [Christmas wafer] were taken away from him. On December 28, Czeslaw Lipka received 14 days' punishment on a hard bed. Then, Miroslaw Mlodecki was summoned to the warden. He refused to go, and the "operation group" under Captain Goldyn visited us. They threw Miroslaw onto the floor from his upper bunk, dragging him by the beard and legs. He was kicked in the spine several times. They ripped off his silver chain of the Virgin Mary. Captain Goldyn screamed that he would finish us "Reaganites" off, and that we would want to emigrate to the West. Miroslaw was given 14 days' punishment. He and Leszek Zubik were beaten up in the punishment cells for refusing to perform physical exercises. Zbyszek Koraczewski was also given seven days in a punishment cell. ... We were all punished for refusing to go out for exercise, for refusing to be counted, and for refusing to eat.

From a statement issued by prisoners,  
*Tygodnik Mazowsze*, No. 114.

Published in Comm. in Support of Solidarity Reports, Mar. 11, 1985.

### **The Treatment of Zygmunt Burchardt**

. . . Zygmunt Burchardt is under the constant care of a neurologist. His condition is a result of beatings and injuries received during his pre-trial interrogations. He has contracted tuberculosis while in prison.

From *Solidarnosc Walczaca* [underground],  
No. 25/92, December 29, 1984

Published in Comm. in Support of Solidarity Reports, April 11, 1985.

### **Hunger Strike at Leczyca Prison**

On 30 September [1985 at Leczyca prison], the governor, Chrzanowski, told Frasyniuk, Lucarz, and Wypych that they would not be moved back to their original cells and that he had full authority "to break their bones, if necessary." Further beatings and intimidation followed. When the political prisoners refused to be taken to the prison barber fearing that such a departure from the normal practice which is that the barber comes to cells could be ominous they were again dragged out of their cells and beaten. Andrzej Filipczuk who had a bad knee and cannot move without crutches given to him only for walks in the prison yard was carried out by wardens who pulled and twisted his genitals. Later, when he was being shaved, one of his oppressors kept poking him in the eyes with his fingers. The method of twisting genitals was also used on Gos. When another political prisoner, Jerzy Kajak from Rzeszow, was being carried out from the cell, one of the watching officers came up to him and violently twisted his ankle. Kajak was heard howling with pain and soon the leg was swollen up to the knee. That evening Filipczuk and Kajak were taken to a hospital at Lodz only to be returned to prison. It is also known that Jerzy Andrzejewski from Siedlce was savagely beaten: he had a black eye and his right arm was covered in red and blue bruises. On 2 October, after 8 p.m. as the prisoners were getting ready to sleep, the prison governor arrived with thirty wardens and the beating started again. Kajak was repeatedly kicked in his swollen leg.

From *Uncensored Poland*, No. 20/85

### **Punishment at Rakowiecka Prison**

Grzegorz Myszkowski has been beaten and kept for a day in what can only be termed a dungeon whilst under investigative arrest at Rakowiecka Prison. On November 28, 1985, two prison officers told Myszkowski that he was to be punished with "the hard bed," without giving him any reason. When he refused to leave his cell, a group of guards forcefully dragged him out to a cellar in Block 1. To stop him from shouting on the way, the officers gagged him and kept choking him with a towel and bare hands until he fainted. They brought him back to consciousness by beating him about the face and pulling his hair. He was then ordered to undress and, completely naked, was locked in an underground cell, without any sanitary facilities and with the floor covered with rotting human excrement. After some two or three hours in temperature not higher than 50 degrees F (10 C) he was given a wet pair of underpants and after a few more hours a top, mattress and a blanket, all covered with dirt. He was not allowed to leave the cell to go to the toilet. All his protests were met with abuse and jeers on the part of the guards. The following afternoon he was taken to the prison governor who banned food parcels for Myszkowski for three months, ordered him to be shorn, and punished him with the hard bed and solitary confinement for two weeks. For the duration of the punishment Myszkowski was kept in a four square yards cell and despite his demands was not allowed to see a doctor.

*From Tygodnik Mazowsze, No. 166*

### **Beating at Miedzyrzecze Prison**

Seventy ZOMO (riot police) officers in full riot gear were brought on December 17, 1985 to the investigative detention centre at Miedzyrzecze, where they carried out searches in cells and savagely beat the detainees. The cries and shrieks of the beaten calling for help mixed with the howling of the attacking policemen. After the first round of beating the detainees were ordered to leave their cells and had to run between two rows of policemen hitting them with their

truncheons to the cellar where again body searches were carried out. They were told to face the wall and do sit-ups with hands above their heads. Those who could not keep up with the rhythm were hit with truncheons on the legs or bottoms. To return to their cells the detainees had again to run between two rows of police officers. Further searches were conducted in the cells and in some cases detainees had to repeat the whole cycle two or even three times. It was evident that the police officers had been given before the operation either drugs or alcohol. Afterwards no one was allowed to file a formal complaint to the court and those who complained to the prison doctor were scorned and derided by him.

From *Feniks*, Gorzow Wielkopolski, No. 86

Published in *Uncensored Poland*, No. 11/86

#### **The Treatment of Political Prisoners at Warsaw's Rakowiecka Prison**

Seweryn Jaworski's situation is also dramatic. Until now, he has had all of the punishments allowed by the rule-book inflicted upon him: his right to correspondence has been taken away, parcels from home returned, he has been forbidden to use the prison store. He has also been harassed by the warders' ridiculing his religious beliefs: the cross he has in the cell would be torn from the wall and the rosary from his neck and the warders would deliberately kick them around the floor. Recently, however, Jaworski was additionally tormented by placing him on 21 August [1986] in the "thermos," a small, cold sound-proof cell. He spent there 24 hours, stripped naked, in low temperature. The "thermos" is two feet square, with a large window and a peephole roughly 7 by 3 inches, with a television camera over the door and virtually no furniture or sanitary facility. A prisoner confined to the "thermos" must relieve himself on the floor. After 24 hours in these conditions, Jaworski suffers from ear inflammation. Moreover his ulcerous condition has deteriorated because he has not received any medication. His submission to see the doctor on 22 August has been rejected. Straight after the "thermos" stretch, Seweryn

Jaworski and Marek Gogacz have been punished with the "hard bed" [prisoners are forced to sleep on wooden bunks with nothing but a blanket].

From *KOS*, No. 100

Published in *Uncensored Poland*, No. 20/86

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